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Testimony in Opposition to the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget

Good Afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Fraser; I am a policy analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote family economic success through both policy and program work.

I am here tonight on behalf of CAHS to voice opposition to the Governors proposed biennial budget.

Education is a path to opportunity. The money spent today on education and educational supports, affects the future wellbeing of Connecticut. There are some that believe publically funded education should only consist of direct instruction to children and youth. However, this is not an effective system of education. Children live in the context of family, school and community. It is the relationships that are cultivated through these foundational environments that generate adjusted, healthy and accomplished adults.

While the Governor's budget keeps much of the core early childhood programming in place, it underestimates the importance of family, community and early intervention in the lives of our children. We are concerned that many programs that are designed to help children and families were completely eliminated from the budget. The elimination of these substantive supports will compromise the growing system of early care and education and greatly impact the ability of many families and communities to provide what children need.

It is regrettable that many of the programs that empower parents to take an active role in their child's life are included in this category. Some of these programs include:

- **Children's Trust Fund Programs:** Family School Connection and Family Empowerment
- **Help Me Grow:** which provides an accessible screening tool that parents can use to track their young children's development. The results provide valuable information that can lead to early identification of developmental delays and subsequent early intervention. Early intervention has been proven cost effective. The elimination of this program could actually end up costing the state money.
- **School age funding in the Childcare Services Program:** providing extended hours for school age children in some of our most in need communities.
- **The Parent Trust Fund:** which supports the nationally acclaimed Parent Leadership Training Institute.

- **Parent Universities:** providing opportunities for parents to learn about key educational issues in a peer learning environment.

These family support programs provide avenues for parents to connect to children and to discover their role in the education of their children. These connections are important to our developing early care and education system and to our efforts to strengthen families. We respectfully suggest that these programs remain funded.

The funding for the “Community Plans for Early Childhood” is also a casualty of this budget. This line item constitutes the state contribution to the public/ philanthropic partnership with the Graustein Memorial Foundation. Should the state money disappear, the matching funds would certainly follow.

To clarify, the word “plans” is misleading. This partnership funds far more than plans. It supports a statewide network of local collaboratives that work to promote the health and wellbeing of our youngest children.

Based on research and local community need, these collaboratives have designed and implemented strategies to address barriers to early learning success. Local community initiatives have promoted early literacy, reduced summer learning loss, addressed the causes of chronic absenteeism and provided needed information to decrease childhood obesity. All initiatives are data driven and have measurable outcomes. Often communities are able to use their collective partnerships to leverage other philanthropic funding.

Community collaboratives are a reminder that system building does not only happen horizontally through state agencies. For a system to be truly effective it must have vertical layers that reach down into community. Those that work at the local level can best glean what is needed in their particular community. They can use local data to discover where gaps in services exist and then provide this information to the statewide agencies that have the capacity to provide needed supports and direction. We need system development at both the state and local level. The deletion of this partnership will have serious implications for both individual communities and our statewide system building strategies.

We are pleased that essential early care programs remain in place. School Readiness Programs, Care for Kids and Family Resource Centers will remain viable. However, the flat funding does not take into consideration the need to address wages for our early care and education providers. New educational standards for providers are in place and will be fully implemented by 2020. By 2020, all early care teachers in centers receiving state dollars will need to have attained a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education or the equivalent. Although this is an important step towards providing high quality programs, the existing wage structure is a deterrent for those who have the qualifications and want work in the field. Early care centers are already losing early care teachers to the public school system, where salaries are commensurate with education and experience. If this is not addressed we will be in danger of losing the staffing necessary to maintain programs.

As Connecticut continues to build and grow a system of early care and education, it is important to be cognizant of what we have in place and what would be lost if it were to disappear. We need to value parents and communities as partners in this work.